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ABSTRACT

This report is the fourth in a series describing the background, theory, and progress of the Differentiated Staffing Project in the Eugene, Oregon, School District. This report discusses the effects of the addition of paid paraprofessionals, or Teaching Assistants (TAs), to the unitized, differentiated staffing schools in Eugene. Specifically, it focuses on the rationale for utilizing TAs, the methods used to select them, and the results of the TA's work in the school. The report also includes some recommendations for the district to consider about the future of teaching assistants in the district. (Author)

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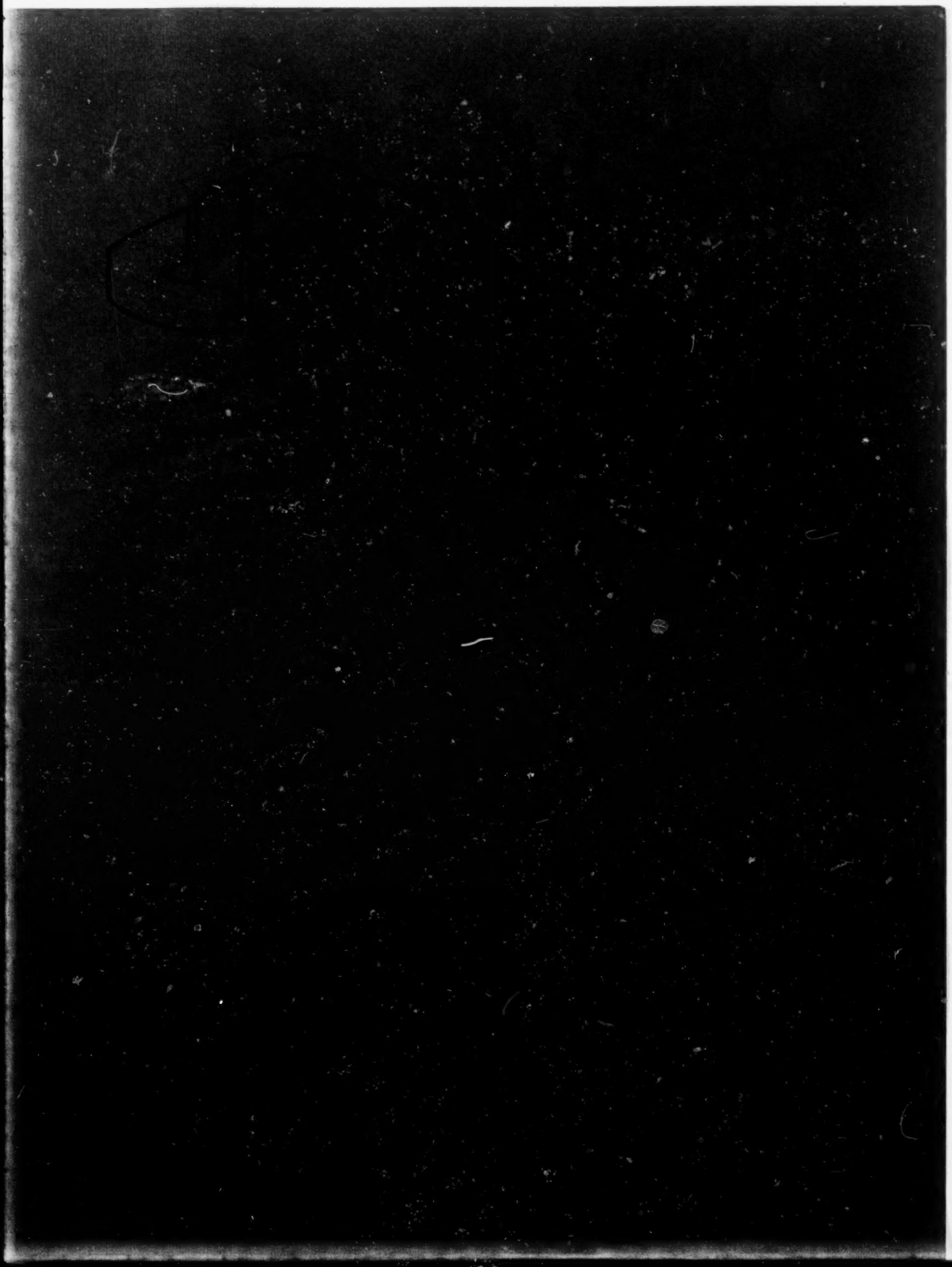

PURPOSE

This report discusses the effects of the addition of paid paraprofessional, hereafter referred to as Teaching Assistants or TAs, to the Unitized, Differentiated Staffing Schools in Eugene. Specifically, it focuses on the rationale of having TAs, the methods used to select them, and the results of the TAs work in the school. The report also includes a number of recommendations for the district to consider as to the future of Teaching Assistants in the district.

IN PERSPECTIVE

A long-standing goal for the elementary school has been "individualized instruction." This goal was first proposed by progressive educators -- taking their lead from Dewey -- in the early part of the twentieth century. The popularity of the idea rose and fell over the years, and then reformers of the 1960s again emphasized the need to "individualize" instruction to meet the unique needs of each student. What is generally meant by "individualized instruction" is that each child's abilities and goals should be identified, and appropriate instruction provided to help him achieve his goals within the reach of his abilities.

As is often the case in education, however, there is a large gap between the rhetoric and the reality. Elementary teachers have not been able to individualize instruction even though they believe they should, largely because it is all but impossible for one teacher in a self-contained classroom to create and carry out different learning agendas for each of twenty-five or thirty children. Even with the

introduction of various auxiliary personnel into the elementary school -- counselors, resource teachers, specialists, and teacher aides -- the teacher has found it extremely difficult to provide the variety of activities and attention necessary to individualize instruction. It is almost impossible for the teacher to work with a single child or even with a small group of students having similar goals and abilities for any concentrated length of time.

Providing individualized instruction is very difficult, as noted above, as long as one limits one's thinking to self-contained classrooms. The question to be answered becomes, "How can the teacher individualize instruction within her own classroom?" and the solution usually proposed is that of hiring more teachers. This solution would provide smaller student-teacher ratios, and would perhaps allow teachers more opportunities to individualize the program. However, there are two major drawbacks to this proposal. First, the current tight money situation in education means that funds to hire more teachers just aren't available. Second, even if the money were available, simply adding more teachers does not guarantee that there will be any significant changes in the nature of the instructional program.

The DS coordinators attacked the problem from a different angle, and asked the question, "How can a school staff find ways to use a particular teacher's strengths to help students who may or may not be in her classroom?" There were two parts to our answer. First, the Differentiated Staffing Unitized Organizational Structure seemed to hold great potential for flexibility in teaching-learning arrangements, and could be used to create the opportunity for individualized instruction much more easily than could a self-contained classroom arrangement. Second, it seemed practical to explore the possibilities of individualizing

instruction at a moderate cost by hiring assistants who would work directly with teachers and students. Such an assistant might work with an individual student while the teacher works with the rest of the class (or vice versa); and three Teaching Assistants could be employed for the same cost as hiring one teacher.

This rationale provided the basis for the creation of the Teaching Assistant program within the Eugene DS Project.

It was expected that the TA position would be an attractive job for a wide variety of persons, including those who wanted to become teachers and wished to gain some experience working directly with students. It was predicted that other persons who might seek the position would be certified teachers who no longer desired the full responsibility of the classroom but wished to continue working with children, parents in the community who enjoyed working with children and desired part-time employment, or those who just wished to have a job in the schools.

The initial role description for the TA position described the job as one of: providing individual or small-group activities for children that supported the regular programs taught by the staff, working with individuals or small groups in activities of high interest to particular students, and assisting the teaching staff in large group activities throughout the teaching Unit. A copy of the original role description is found in Appendix A.

PROCEDURES

After the district administration agreed to include Teaching Assistants in the project design, the DS Coordinators began developing the tentative role description just outlined, in cooperation and

consultation with the district's Personnel Director, a number of elementary teachers, representatives of the Teacher Education and Professional Standards Committee of the Eugene Education Association and Oregon State Department of Education. The literature obtained from other DS projects also helped guide the writing of the role description.

It was then decided that -- for the experimental phase of the project -- one TA would be hired for each of the teaching Units at Parker and Spring Creek schools. Thus, one TA was provided for approximately every 150 to 175 students. The Coordinators and Personnel Director set the salary for the TA at $2.50 per hour, and the work day at six hours.

Notification of the openings was sent to each school in the district, and additional candidates were found on the list of applicants for teacher aide positions. As applications were received by the DS Coordinators, they were channeled to the leadership team in each school. (Since CAs at Parker and Spring Creek had already been selected, it was felt that they and the principal could serve as a committee for screening and interviewing applicants.) Each leadership team screened the applications, consulted with other staff members, and interviewed a number of applicants before selecting the TAs hired.

All six Teaching Assistants participated in the Organizational Development Training labs conducted in August, 1970. Part of the design for the labs included activities that would develop and clarify the TA role. All teaching units were instructed to use the TAs according to the guidelines stated in the role description, but it was hoped that the description would be modified and improved as the result of experience gained during the project. The Teaching Assistants

have been included in all the follow-up training activities to date.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The information in this section has been gathered from a variety of sources. Most of the data were gathered in interviews with Teaching Assistants and other staff members in the DS schools. Other data are from logs kept by the six TAs at Parker and Spring Creek. Finally, some information is taken from the report by the visitation teams from the Eugene Education Association and the Eugene Principals' Association.

The following comments were included in the EEA-EPA report:

> Very effective use of paraprofessionals (Teaching Assistants) was observed but there was also an indication of need for training in use of paraprofessionals by teachers. Safeguards should be maintained to prevent paraprofessionals from assuming inappropriate responsibility.
>
> The paraprofessional role showed the greatest divergence. Some actually planned and carried out academic instruction, some assisted teachers, while others worked independently with students tutoring or in small groups carrying out teacher-initiated activities or carrying out teacher plans. In a few cases they were given groups of children for music or other activities without teacher supervision.

It has been concluded by the DS Coordinators that the visiting teams located the variation in the TA role. This variation from school to school and unit to unit has been encouraged by the Coordinators mainly to test a number of variables about the position. For example, the ways teachers will utilize the Teaching Assistant, and the different expectations various units will have for the TA position.

The data from the logs kept by the six TAs support the observations by the visiting teams, and indicate more specifically the various

activities performed by the TAs as a group. The following chart indicates the various categories of duties performed by the TAs and the percentages of times given to each. Some specific examples of each category are given under each listing.

TIME SPENT BY TEACHING ASSISTANTS

From TA Log Sheets

Categories of Tasks	Percentage of time spent per week
1) Working with Total Class of Students. (discussion, reading to class, hearing students read)	26.6%
2) Working with Small Student Groups. (discussion, skill reinforcement, hearing students read)	20.1%
3) Working with Individual Students. (Skill reinforcement, assisting with research, desk-to-desk individual help)	13.2%
4) Working with Staff. (attending meetings, planning, seeking out materials)	9.6%
5) Clerical Duties. (reproducing materials, constructing materials, correcting papers)	18.9%
6) Supervision Duties. (recess, playground)	5.5%
7) Working Alone. (planning)	6.1%

Some of the reactions of the DS Coordinators to the data on the chart are:

1) The total percentage of time that the TAs work directly with students categories 1, 2 and 3 is acceptable (59.9%) but is much lower than expected. Hopefully, a greater percentage of time can be given students and less time to the other categories.
2) The amount of time spent on clerical duties (18.9%) is too high. This perhaps indicates that teachers have perceived the TA position as another teacher aide, and have expected the TA to assume more clerical duties than was expected.
3) The amount of time in the categories that indicate working with staff, working alone, and supervising students seems realistic in relation to the position and time needed to do those jobs.

On the log sheets TAs were also asked to state their thoughts and feelings about aspects of their work. The following comments summarize the TAs' responses:

1) They receive most of their supervision and do most of their planning with the Unit's Curriculum Associate.
2) The OD training helped them to feel a part of the Unit.
3) They feel a strong need to increase the number of daily working hours, the number of hours spent working directly with students, and the amount of training needed to perform the TA job.

Generally, the TAs indicated high job satisfaction but expressed some personal concerns and recommendations for change. This information was then relayed to the Curriculum Associates by the DS Coordinators. Several changes are occuring and different results appear to be emerging during the second year of the experimental phase. A copy of the actual log sheets used is found in Appendix B.

Reactions from other staff members at Parker and Spring Creek about the role and performance of the TA have been mixed. Staff members feel most positive about the assistance that TAs provide to individuals and small groups of students, the working relationship between TAs and other staff members, and the willingness with which the TAs have performed the tasks requested of them. On the other hand, staff members have been concerned with the difficulty in trying to develop a new role for the district, with identifying when a TA can and cannot work with students on his own, and in overcoming the feelings that the TA is another clerical aide.

Some district personnel (not directly teaching or working in the DS schools) have expressed concern about the future impact of the TA program as it relates to protecting educators. The most usual question from those connected to the professional teaching associations is, "If you can hire three Teaching Assistants for the same amount as one teacher, what is to prevent boards and administrators from replacing some teachers with Teaching Assistants?" The response of the DS Coordinators has been that of recognizing that a potential problem exists and that a solution will have to be found. We do not have the answer ready this instant, but we do feel that the answer is <u>not</u> to abolish the TA position. One of the recommendations in the

following section relates to this issue.

The other major issue, primarily among those involved in personnel practices in the district, is the question of how much time should the TA work directly with students, and what kinds of activities should the TA be allowed to conduct with them. The development of the TA position to date indicates to the DS Coordinators a strong need to produce a clear and concise description of the TA role, with specific guidelines for time allotments for the TAs activities with students. This is necessary to prevent the use of TAs as substitutes for absent teachers, and insure that TAs will not be expected to plan lessons, conduct the activities, and evaluate students. Planning lessons, conducting activities, and evaluating students are aspects of the role of the certificated teacher. Only the second of these, that of conducting activities, should properly be included in the TA role; indeed, it is the basic function of the TA. A second recommendation of the next section is offered as part of the response for those concerns.

In summary, the data so far indicate that Teaching Assistants are generally performing the tasks originally expected of them in the position. Further, there has been no emerging effort on the part of the Spring Creek and Parker staffs to seek more Teaching Assistants by releasing some of their certified teachers. Finally, neither staff has demonstrated a willfull intent to misuse the Teaching Assistants in any way. In fact, there has been a concerted effort in both schools to be extremely careful that the TAs are not misused and that they are asked to perform only their expected role.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are proposed by the DS Coordinators after studying the data gathered to date and after much deliberation and consultation with the Personnel Director, Area Directors, principals and teachers in the DS schools, and the Teaching Assistants themselves. They are presented as ideas for the beginning of further discussion and negotiation about the role of the TA and its potential for the Eugene School District.

The first recommendation addresses itself to the issue raised by many professional educators, namely, that the Teaching Assistant program is a major potential threat to teachers because approximately three Teaching Assistants can be employed for one average teaching salary. The recommendation has the following four components:

1) We propose that the district board and administration consider a major change in the budget allotments for the staffing of schools. It is suggested that an allotment be established, as is presently the case, for the provision of a necessary number of professional and clerical staff.

2) A basic change we propose is that the district in addition establish a flexible allotment for staffing each school. There would be no restrictions on the use of this allotment for either professional or non-certified staff. However, each school staff would be required to show evidence to the administration of having evaluated its needs for staff, to indicate to the administration the intended utilization of personnel acquired from the flexible allotment, and to provide a plan of

action for evaluating the results of that staff performance. The flexible allotment would allow each staff to decide whether the needs of the program would best be met by the use of TAs or of other specialists.

3) It is proposed that a school with a well-designed plan for staffing and evaluation of its program at a designated time could request the addition of Teaching Assistants from the monies allotted for certificated or non-certificated staff. It is suggested at this time, however, that a limit be set upon the amount of money that could be used from either allotment.

4) Finally, it is suggested that the EEA TEPS committee, the District Personnel Director, and the area directors work jointly with the DS Coordinators and the TAs to develop final guidelines for the previous three sections of this recommendation. These guidelines would be completed by June, 1972.

The second recommendation relates directly to the role of the Teaching Assistant, and proposes the acceptance of the position in the district's staffing pattern as an alternative way of providing education for students. The recommendation is as follows:

> We propose that the Teaching Assistant position be accepted as a regular position in the staffing pattern of the Eugene School District. Acceptance of this proposal would not necessarily provide each school in the district to have an equal number of TAs. It would mean that the position is available for schools that determine that Teaching Assistants could help them to improve the program

in that school. We mean that the district will have a set of guidelines for selecting Teaching Assistants, a description of the actual roles that the TA can perform, and a policy stating who is responsible for supervision and evaluation of the TA. It is suggested that these guidelines be developed by the same group formed in recommendation number 1.

A final recommendation is that the five elementary schools presently participating in the DS Project be provided monies to continue the Teaching Assistant Program. This provision would cover the transitional period until the studies are completed regarding the methods of budgeting in schools, the final rate of pay, and the TA role description. It is proposed that an increase in salary be granted to those TAs who have worked for one or two years in the project's experimental phase. It is further recommended that the monies needed for this recommendation be drawn from the present budget allotment for the experimental phase of the DS Project.

A FINAL REMARK

In summary, we strongly recommend that the Teaching Assistant position be established in the district as another alternative way to organize staffs for instruction. The data indicate very positive outcomes from the program to date. Recognizing the various concerns and problems also indicated by the data, the DS Coordinators will continue through the rest of this year to make the adjustments necessary to overcome the concerns.

We are convinced that the recommendations proposed in this report are realistic for the district in terms of how the district can finance such a program, how guidelines should be established for further development of the Teaching Assistant role, and what requirements must be placed upon school staffs that decide to utilize the services of the TA.

Appendix A

EUGENE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Differentiated Staffing Project
May, 1970

PARAPROFESSIONAL
ROLE ANALYSIS

Description

The paraprofessional shall provide instructional assistance to the certified staff. The main responsibility will be to serve as teaching technician, performing a number of teaching tasks with students.

Specific Functions

1) Provide individual research help for students seeking assistance.

2) Serve as listener and helper to small reading groups.

3) Serve as a discussion leader for large or small groups.

4) Seek out information and materials for instruction by self or other unit staff members.

5) Provide assistance to teachers in analyzing individual student progress.

6) Assist teachers in the creation of learning packages or programs.

7) Operate audio-visual aids for groups of students.

8) Salary and contract hours are presently being considered.

Personal Qualities Desired

1) Demonstrates positive attitude toward children.

2) Demonstrates awareness of educational goals and objectives.

3) Possesses ability to relate positively with other adults.

4) Demonstrates ability to follow instructions and carry out necessary tasks.

5) Demonstrates desire to improve self skills and instructional skills necessary to the position.

Appendix B

EUGENE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Differentiated Staffing Project
Instructional Assistants Log - 1970-71

NAME _____ DATE _____
DAY
SCHOOL _____ LOGGED _____

A. Estimate the time in minutes spent on each task.

TASK	NO. OF MINUTES Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri
1. Working with Total Class of Students					
a. Discussion					
b. Reading to class					
c. Hearing pupils read					
d. Operating audio-visual aids					
e. Administrating assignments & monitoring tests					
2. Working with Small Student Groups					
a. Discussion					
b. Skill reinforcement - Conducting drill exercises					
c. Hearing pupils read					
d. Assisting with student research					
3. Working with Individual Students					
a. Reinforcement of skills					
b. Assisting with student research					
c. Desk to desk individual help					
d. Reading to a student					
e. Hearing a student read					
4. Working with Staff					
a. Seeking out materials					
b. Attending meetings					
c. Assisting with Evaluation of Students					

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri
5. Clerical Duties					
a. Reproducing test, worksheets, transparencies					
b. Constructing materials (bulletin boards, games, etc.)					
c. Correcting papers and tests					
d. Housekeeping					
e. Hearing a student read					
6. Supervision Duties					
a. Recess supervision					
b. Noon duty					
c. Halls supervision					
d. Field trips					
7. Working Alone					
a. Planning					
b. Research					

B. List difficulties or problems encountered during the week. How were they resolved?

C. List any tasks performed that do not fit the categories in section A. How much time did the tasks take?

NAME _____ SCHOOL _____

DATE _____

1) From whom do you receive most of your supervision?

2) With whom do you spend most of your time planning for what you do?

3) Discuss any general thoughts or feelings about the position of Teaching Assistant (paraprofessional) that you might have at this time.

4) Are there any particular kinds of training programs that you think would be beneficial at this time in assisting you in fulfilling your responsibilities better?